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'Philby Conspiracy'

Bureaucracy and Whitewash: Ins and Outs of Espionage

THE PHILBY CONSPIRACY. By Bruce Page, David Leitch and Phillip Knightley. (Doubleday. \$5.95.)

Over the years the public has become generally acquainted with the case of Kim Philby, a key figure in the British secret service who was a Soviet spy — a man who should have been caught years ago when defectors Burgess and Maclean escaped to Russia.

This is a very detailed history of the case, prepared by three British journalists. They acknowledge frankly that trying to establish facts about the devious ins and outs of espionage is a slippery enterprise. Their deductions usually have to be based on circumstantial evidence; sometimes they descend into conjecture. Yet if only a portion of their surmises are correct, the story is really fantastic.

Besides being a report on a major spy case, the book is an expose of the incredible state of British bureaucracy during and after the Second World War.

The Secret Service seems to have been run by amateurish old-school-tie cliques, and the

counterespionage service appears to have been one great sea of inefficiency — with the two services feuding.

Even under the pressures of war, it seems appalling that Philby could have wormed his way into the spy service by posing as a pro-Franco journalist in Spain, when even a casual investigation would have shown that he was a Marxist in college and a crypto-Communist in Vienna, and that his first wife was a known Communist.

And even after the defection of Burgess and Maclean, there was a scandalous bureaucratic whitewash of Philby's connection with them.

The Establishment seemed both blind and unwilling to see. And more than once sheer lethargy played its part — officialdom decided on a Friday to turn the heat on Maclean; but as no one violates a British weekend, the move was scheduled for Monday, and Maclean and Burgess fled.

The authors present a very exhaustive treatment of the whole chilling affair.